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P/7247 GBA

2. Parent application number

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3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (underline all surnames)

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Patents ADP number (if you know it)

8230831002

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

ISLE OF MAN

4. Title of the invention

MULTIPLAYER GAMING SYSTEM

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

"Address for service" in the United Kingdom to which all correspondence should be sent (including the postcode)

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07188725001

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Description

33

Claims(s)

Abstract

Drawing(s)

12 only

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Priority documents

Translations of priority documents

Statement of inventorship and right to grant of a patent (Patents Form 7/77)

Request for preliminary examination and search (Patents Form 9/77)

Request for substantive examination (Patents Form 10/77)

Any other documents (please specify)

11. I/We request the grant of a patent on the basis of this application.

Signature(s)

Date: 02.10.03

MAGUIRE BOSS

Maguire Boss

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MULTIPLAYER GAMING SYSTEM**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

20 This invention relates to a multiplayer gaming system for playing a game, more specifically, a multiplayer game and, more particularly, to a multiplayer gaming system for playing a multiplayer game on which wagers may be placed. The invention extends to a method of operation of a multiplayer gaming system for playing a multiplayer game on which wagers may be placed.

25

BACKGROUND TO THE INVENTION

30 The game of poker is a multiplayer game that is widely played in many jurisdictions, particularly in the United States of America. In order to illustrate various advantageous features of multiplayer games, the basic rules of poker will be outlined briefly in the description that follows.

35 A traditional game of poker generally accommodates a minimum of 4 and a maximum of between 8 and 10 players. In a turn of the game, one of the participating players assumes the role of a dealer and deals five cards (an "initial

- 5 hand"), from a conventional deck of 52 playing cards, to each participating player, inclusive of the dealer. The playing cards in the initial hand are dealt face down to each player who does not, at this stage of the game, disclose the playing cards that have been dealt to him.
- 10 Each one of the players is then required to decide, in turn, whether to continue with his participation in the turn of the game (that is, to "play"), or to terminate his participation in the turn (that is, to "fold"), as a function of the playing cards in his initial hand. Any player who decides to fold does not participate any longer in the turn of the game. If all participating players decide to fold, the turn of the game
- 15 terminates. The first player to decide to play is required to make an opening wager on the turn of the game. Any other player who subsequently also decides to play in the turn of the game is required to match or to increase ("raise") the size of the opening wager. When the size of the opening wager is raised, players who have made prior opening wagers are required to top up their wagers to
- 20 match the size of the largest opening wager made by any player who has elected to play in the turn of the game. This phase of the turn of the game continues until every player who desires to play in that turn has made an equivalent opening wager.
- 25 All the wagers made by each of the players are accumulated in a single jackpot ("the pot").

- At this stage of the game, each player who has decided to play may, in turn, then decide to retain (that is, to "hold") any one or more of the five cards in his initial
- 30 hand. Once a player has decided which, if any, of the five cards to hold, the player may then "draw", in which the remaining cards of the initial hand are discarded and are replaced by an equivalent number of further cards dealt by the dealer from the deck of playing cards. This phase of the game will be referred to, for convenience, as the drawing phase. If the player does not hold any of the
- 35 cards, in his initial hand, he is then effectively dealt an entirely new hand of five cards at the drawing phase of the game. On the other hand, if a particular player

- 3
- 5 holds all of the five cards in his initial hand, he does not participate in the drawing phase, but still continues to play in the turn of the game.

- 10 Once the drawing phase of the game has been completed, each player evaluates the five cards he has accumulated in the manner described above in order to determine whether they contain any one of a number of desirable combinations of playing cards. The desirability of any combination of playing cards is inversely proportional to the probability of being dealt that particular combination of cards.

- 15 After completion of the drawing phase of a turn of the game and evaluation of the playing cards, all of the players who have previously decided to play in the particular turn of the game are then again required to decide, in turn, as a function of the playing cards they have accumulated in the manner described above, whether to continue playing or to fold. If all these players decide to fold, the turn of the game terminates. The contents of the pot are carried forward to the next turn of the game. Any player who decides to fold does not participate
- 20 any further in the particular turn of the game and forfeits all wagers he has made in that turn. The first player who makes an opening wager may, if he decides to play, make a supplementary wager on the turn of the game. Any other player who also decides to play is required to match or to raise the size of the supplementary wager. Players who have previously made supplementary wagers
- 25 are required to top up their supplementary wagers to match the size of the largest supplementary wager. This phase of the particular turn of the game continues until every player who has not folded has made an equivalent supplementary wager. This stage of the game will be referred to, for convenience, as the
- 30 supplementary wagering stage.

The supplementary wagers made by each of the players who have decided to continue playing in the particular turn of the game are added to the pot.

- 35 Once the supplementary wagering stage of the turn of the game has been completed, the players who remain in the game reveal the playing cards in their

5 hands. The hands are compared, and the player with the highest-ranking desirable hand wins the accumulated pot.

The rules of the game of poker have been described with particular reference to a variation of the game known as "draw poker". There are many other variations
10 of the game of poker that are not germane to the essence of the invention and that will not, for this reason, be described here in detail.

It will be appreciated by those skilled in that art that the game of poker is a zero-sum game insofar as, in each turn of the game, a gain of the winner is equal to
15 accumulated losses of the other players in the game. It is, however, also known for a party who arranges or hosts a game of poker to levy a commission ("a rake") on the players or on the accumulated jackpot in order to obtain revenue.

The game of poker is played at both land-based venues and on-line, in the latter
20 instance by means of the World Wide Web of the Internet. Where the game is played on-line, a software program spawns multiple instances of the game, each instance being known as a "poker room", to accommodate players wishing to participate in the game. Thus, any instance of the game, or poker room, accommodates participating players who may be geographically remote from
25 each other. The software program offers the participating players with various artifices such as, for example, a chat facility, which allow the players to interact with each other, thereby establishing a sense of community such as would be found at a game being played at a land-based venue.

30 The game of slots is probably the most popular and widely played single-user casino game available to players. The most common game of slots is found in a simple three-reel slot machine. Each reel of the slot machine has, say, 30 indexed positions, some or all of which may display a corresponding indicium. A player of the slot machine is required to place a wager on an outcome of the
35 casino game by introducing coins, tokens or credit into the slot machine, which then enables each of the three reels to be spun and to come to rest at any of the

5 indexed positions. An outcome of the game is determined as a function of a combination of the three resulting indexed rest positions. Several outcomes of the game usually result in the player being awarded corresponding prizes, one particular outcome causing the player to win a jackpot prize. A slot machine with the particular characteristics described above has a jackpot cycle of 27 000, 10 which means that, on average, 27 000 outcomes of the game must be determined in order for the jackpot to be won by the player.

The three reel slot machine described above may be a free-standing electro-mechanical or electronic machine suitable for use in a land-based venue, or may, 15 alternatively, be an on-line implementation, where the three reels of the slot machine are simulated on a display monitor, while an outcome of the game is derived from a random number generator implemented in software. It will be appreciated that the game of slots is a single-player game, unlike the game of poker described above. Although banks of slot machines may be found in land- 20 based casinos, each player at such a bank of machines is playing the game individually for himself. An advantage of such single-player games is that of rapid play and the immediacy of a result in a turn of a game.

It is desirable to combine the immediacy of a single-player casino game with the 25 community aspects that are obtainable in a multiplayer casino game.

OBJECT OF THE INVENTION

30 It is an object of this invention to provide a multiplayer gaming system and a method of operation thereof that will, at least partially, enable a single-player game to be played in a multiplayer environment.

35 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

5 In accordance with this invention there is provided a multiplayer gaming system usable by a number of participating players to play a multiplayer game, comprising:

a plurality of player stations, each player station being usable by a respective participating player to play a separate instance of a particular single-user game,
10 the player station enabling the participating player to place a wager on an outcome of the multiplayer game; and
an administration facility communicable with each one of the plurality of player stations

characterised in that
15 the multiplayer game has at least one favourable outcome causing at least one of the participating players to win a prize, the administration facility being operable to determine an outcome of the multiplayer game as a function of the combined outcomes of the separate instances of the single user game played at the plurality of player stations.

20

Further features of the invention provide for a single turn of the multiplayer game to include at least one corresponding turn of an instance of the single-user game at each one of the plurality of player stations in use by a participating player, for the administration facility to accumulate in an accumulation account, in each
25 separate turn of the multiplayer game, all wagers by the participating players at each one of at each one of the plurality of player stations in use, for the administration facility to determine an outcome of a turn of the multiplayer game only after completion of at least one corresponding turn of an instance of the single-user game for each participating player, respectively, for an outcome of
30 the multiplayer game to be a favourable outcome if at least one participating player is determined as being a winner by the administration facility, for a further outcome of the multiplayer game to be a tie, for the administration facility to award the at least one winning player a prize, for the prize awarded to the at least one winning player to be the contents of the accumulation account, preferably the
35 contents of the accumulation account less a service fee retained by an operator of the multiplayer gaming system, alternatively for the prize awarded to the at

- 5 least one winning player to be the contents of a prize pool, and for the contents of either one of the accumulation account and the prize pool to be shared when the accumulation facility determines two or more winners in the turn of the multiplayer game.
- 10 Still further features of the invention provide for an instance of the single-user game to have a plurality of favourable outcomes, for the plurality of favourable outcomes to be in ranked order from least favourable to most favourable, for the administration facility to determine a winner of the multiplayer game to be a participating player who obtains a highest-ranking outcome of the corresponding
- 15 turn of an instance of the single-user game, for the administration facility to determine the outcome of the multiplayer game to be a tie when two or more participating players obtain a same highest-ranking outcome of the corresponding turn of respective instances of the single-user game, for the administration facility to carry forward the contents of the accumulation account
- 20 to the next turn of the multiplayer game in the event of a tie, for the administration facility to augment the contents of the accumulation account with player wagers from the next turn of the multiplayer game, for the contents of the accumulation account to be carried forward to a next turn of the multiplayer game for a maximum of five consecutive tied results, and for the contents of the
- 25 accumulation account to be divided between winning players upon the occurrence of a sixth tied turn of the multiplayer game.

Yet further features of the invention provide for each player station to display the progress of each instance of the single-player game corresponding to each

30 participating player, for a turn of each instance of the single-player game to be played sequentially, alternatively simultaneously, and for each favourable outcome of the single-player game to be associated with a corresponding prize that is independent of the contents of the accumulation account.

- 35 There is further provided for the administration facility to award a prize to each participating player when a highest ranking favourable outcome occurs in the turn

5 an instance of the single-player game of any participating player, alternatively
when any one of three highest-ranking favourable outcomes occurs in a turn of
an instance of the single-player game of any participating player, and for the
prizes awarded by the administration facility to be independent of the contents of
the accumulation account.

10

There is still further provided for the single-player game to have a bonus
outcome, the occurrence of which enables the participating player in whose
corresponding instance of the single-player game occurred, to participate in the
next turn of the game without placing a wager, alternatively for that player's
15 wager to be paid by the operator of the multiplayer gaming system.

20

There is yet further provided for each favourable outcome of the single-player
game to have a corresponding points value, for a single turn of the multiplayer
game to include a plurality of, preferably 5, turns of the single-player game at
each one of the plurality of player stations in use by a participating player, for the
administration facility to accumulate, for each participating player, points
corresponding to any favourable outcome occurring in the plurality of turns in that
player's instance of the single-player game, and for the administration facility to
award to the participating player with the greatest accumulated point value the
25 contents of the accumulation account, preferably the contents of the
accumulation account less the service fee retained by the operator of the
multiplayer game.

30

There is also provided for the administration facility to require each participating
player to decide, prior to commencement of each of the plurality of turns in that
player's instance of the single-player game, except the first, to decide whether to
continue with the single-player by placing a further wager on the next turn of the
single-player game, or to withdraw from the game, for all subsequent wagers
placed by all participating players to be accumulated in the accumulation
35 account, and for the administration facility to retain in the accumulation account
all previous wagers of any player who withdraws from the multiplayer game.

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There is also provided for the single-user game to be any one of video slots or video poker.

10

The invention extends to a method for playing a multiplayer game, comprising the steps of:

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enabling each one of a plurality of players to participate in the multiplayer game by playing a separate instance of a particular single-player game and placing a wager on an outcome of the multiplayer game;

determining an outcome of the multiplayer game as a function of the combined outcomes of the separate instances of the single-player game; and
awarding a prize to at least one of the participating players as a function of the outcome of the multiplayer game.

20

There is further provided for including in each single turn of the multiplayer game, at least one corresponding turn of each instance of the single-user game played by a participating player, for accumulating in an accumulation account, in each separate turn of the multiplayer game, all wagers by each one of the participating players, for determining an outcome of a turn of the multiplayer game only after completion of at least one corresponding turn of an instance of the single-user game for each participating player, respectively, for an outcome of the multiplayer game to be a favourable outcome if at least one participating player is

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determined as being a winner, for a further outcome of the multiplayer game to be a tie, for awarding a prize to the at least one winning participating player, for awarding the prize to the at least one winning participating player as the contents of the accumulation account, preferably the contents of the accumulation account less a service fee retained by an operator of the multiplayer game, alternatively for awarding the prize to the at least one winning participating player as the contents of a prize pool, and for sharing the contents of either one of the accumulation account and the prize pool when two or more winners are
determined in the turn of the multiplayer game.

35

5 There is still further provided for an instance of the single-user game to have a plurality of favourable outcomes, for the plurality of favourable outcomes to be in ranked order from least favourable to most favourable, for determining a winner of the multiplayer game to be a participating player who obtains a highest-ranking outcome of the corresponding turn of an instance of the single-user game, for
10 determining the outcome of the multiplayer game to be a tie when two or more participating players obtain a same highest-ranking outcome of the corresponding turn of respective instances of the single-user game, for carrying forward the contents of the accumulation account to the next turn of the multiplayer game in the event of a tie, for augmenting the contents of the
15 accumulation account with player wagers from the next turn of the multiplayer game, for carrying forward the contents of the accumulation account to a next turn of the multiplayer game for a maximum of five consecutive tied results, and for dividing the contents of the accumulation account between winning players upon the occurrence of a sixth tied turn of the multiplayer game.

20

There is yet further provided displaying the progress of each instance of the single-player game corresponding to each participating player, for playing a turn of each instance of the single-player game sequentially, alternatively simultaneously, and for associating each favourable outcome of the single-player
25 game with a corresponding prize that is independent of the contents of the accumulation account.

There is also provided for awarding a prize to each participating player when a highest ranking favourable outcome occurs in the turn an instance of the single-
30 player game of any participating player, alternatively when any one of three highest-ranking favourable outcomes occurs in a turn of an instance of the single-player game of any participating player, and for awarding the prizes independently of the contents of the accumulation account.

35 There is also provided for the single-player game to have a bonus outcome, the occurrence of which enables the participating player in whose corresponding

5 instance of the single-player game occurred, to participate in the next turn of the game without placing a wager, alternatively for that player's wager to be paid by the operator of the multiplayer game.

10 There is also provided for each favourable outcome of the single-player game to have a corresponding points value, for including in a single turn of the multiplayer game a plurality of, preferably 5, turns of each instance of the single-player game played by a participating player, for accumulating, for each participating player, points corresponding to any favourable outcome occurring in the plurality of turns in that player's instance of the single-player game, and for awarding to the
15 participating player with the greatest accumulated point value the contents of the accumulation account, preferably the contents of the accumulation account less the service fee retained by the operator of the multiplayer game.

20 There is also provided for requiring each participating player to decide, prior to commencement of each of the plurality of turns in that player's instance of the single-player game, except the first, whether to continue with the single-player by placing a further wager on the next turn of the single-player game, or to withdraw from the game, for accumulating all subsequent wagers placed by all participating players in the accumulation account, and for retaining in the
25 accumulation account all previous wagers of any player who withdraws from the multiplayer game.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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One embodiment of the invention is described below, by way of example only, and with reference to the abovementioned drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is functional diagram of a multiplayer gaming system according to the
35 invention;

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5 Figure 2 is a flow diagram of the steps required for a player to participate in a multiplayer game in the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a flow diagram of the steps required for a participating player to leave an instance of the multiplayer game in the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;
10 and

Figure 4 is a flow diagram of the steps required to settle wagers placed by participating players in the gaming system of Figure 1;

15 Figure 5 is a flow diagram of a "Pot Slot" variation of a multiplayer game playable on the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

Figure 6 is a flow diagram of a "Winner Take All" variation of a multiplayer game playable on the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

20 Figure 7 is a flow diagram of a "Community Slot" variation of a multiplayer game playable on the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

Figure 8 is a flow diagram of a "Best of 5" variation of a multiplayer game
25 playable on the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

Figure 9 is a flow diagram of a "Pot Slot with Community Feature" variation of a multiplayer game playable on the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

30 Figure 10 is a flow diagram of a "Community Slot - Even Distribution" variation of a multiplayer game playable on the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

Figure 11 is a flow diagram of a "Community Slot - 50/50" variation of a multiplayer game playable on the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

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- 5 Figure 12 is a flow diagram of a "Community Slot - 50 Pooled" variation of a multiplayer game playable on the multiplayer gaming system of Figure 1;

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

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Referring to Figures 1, a multiplayer gaming system is indicated generally by reference numeral (1).

- 15 This embodiment of the invention will be described with particular reference to a multiplayer game that is based on multiple separate instances of a single-player game of video slots. It is to be clearly understood, however, that the invention extends to include the use of multiple separate instances of other types of single-player games such as video poker, for example.

- 20 The multiplayer gaming system (1) includes a gaming server (2), and a number of portals (3a, 3b) in the form of portal websites on the World Wide Web of the Internet. In this embodiment, each one of the portal websites is an online casino website hosted on a corresponding casino web server (not shown). For convenience, this particular embodiment of the invention will be described with
- 25 particular reference to only two such online casino websites (3a, 3b). Each one of the online casino websites (3a, 3b) is accessible by a would-be video slots player (not shown) through a player station (4) in the form of an Internet-enabled computer workstation having a display monitor (5) and an associated pointing device (5a) such as a mouse or, alternatively, a touchpad. In this embodiment,
- 30 online casino website (3a) is shown as having one computer workstation (4) logically connected thereto, whereas casino website (3b) is shown as being logically connected to two computer workstations (4). It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that such online casino websites (3a, 3b) can be logically connected to any desired number of such computer workstations (4)
- 35 simultaneously, which number is physically limited only by considerations of processing power and Internet access bandwidth.

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The apparatus (1) includes, further, an administration facility (12) in the form of an application web server, which is communicable with the gaming server (2) along a communication network (9). The detailed operation of the application web server (12) will be outlined in the description that follows.

10

The gaming server (2), the online casino web servers (not shown) corresponding to the online casino websites (3a, 3b), the computer workstations (4) and the application web server (12) are capable of communicating with each other by means of an open communication network that is, in this embodiment, the Internet. Although the Internet is a single packet-switched communication network, it is represented in Figure 1 as separate logical communication networks (6,7,8,9,10 and 11).

The application web server (12) operates a clearing account facility (13) that has a clearing account corresponding to each one of the online casino websites (3a, 3b). Analogously, each online casino website (3a, 3b) includes a corresponding credit account facility (14a, 14b) with a credit account corresponding to each player who participates in a game offered by the online casino. In the illustrated embodiment, therefore, the credit account facility (14a) has one player credit account associated with it, while credit account facility (14b) has two associated, but separate, player credit accounts.

The gaming server (2) operates under control of a stored server program (not shown) capable of enabling a predetermined number, say 8, of players to play an instance of a multiplayer game that will be referred to, for convenience, as "multiplayer slots". When the number of players reaches this predetermined maximum number, the server program causes a further instance of the game of multiplayer slots to be initiated, the new instance of the multiplayer slots game also being capable of accommodating a further 8 players. In this manner, the gaming server is capable, under stored server program control, to spawn as many separate instances of the game of multiplayer slots as required in order to

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5 accommodate a pool of players who desire to play the multiplayer slots game, in groups of a maximum of 8. Each instance of the multiplayer slots game spawned in this manner is treated as totally independent of the other instances of the game.

10 The online casino websites (3a, 3b) enable a player who desires to join the game of multiplayer slots to request, by means of one of the computer workstations (4), participation in the game and, once admitted to an instance of the multiplayer slots game, to place a wager on a turn of that instance of the game. Each participating player in an instance of the game is presented with an identical
15 graphical user interface ("GUI") on his respective computer workstation (4) by a separate stored program (not shown) in the workstation. The GUI presents to the player, on the display monitor (5), a display of the reels of a three-reel video slots game. It will be appreciated that the game of video slots is, as is well known in the art, essentially a single-player game. The GUI also presents to the player a
20 display of 7 further sets of reels of a three-reel video slots game. These further sets of reels correspond to the instances of the single-player video slots game played by the other participating players in the particular instance of the multiplayer slots game. These additional sets of reels are used only for presentation purposes in order that each participating player can follow the
25 progress of all the instances of the video slots games played by the other players in the same instance of the multiplayer game. The GUI clearly distinguishes a player's own set of reels, or instance of the single-player game from those of the other participating players. Each set of reels is identified by a corresponding name, which might be a name assumed by the participating player for participation in the multiplayer slots game, or the participating player's own name.
30

The stored workstation program (not shown) also enables a participating player to place a wager on a turn of the multiplayer slots game, while the application web server (12) is capable of determining whether any wager placed by any
35 participating player on a turn of the game is successful or unsuccessful according to the rules of the multiplayer game. The stored program in the gaming server (2)

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5 also maintains a dynamic register (16) of all players admitted to, and actively participating in, all the spawned instances of the multiplayer slots game from time to time, together with data representative of a corresponding portal (3a, 3b) through which each participating player accessed the multiplayer slots game. The dynamic register (16) also contains data representative of an instance of the
10 multiplayer game in which the player is participating. The application web server (12) also settles the wagers of the participating players after completion of every turn of any instance of the multiplayer game.

Each computer workstation (4) is a conventional personal computer operating
15 under a Windows 2000 operating system, which is well known and commercially available from the Microsoft Corporation of Seattle, Washington, USA. The gaming server (2) operates under the Windows NT operating system. The stored workstation program (not shown) and the corresponding stored server program will be referred to, for convenience, as a client process and a server process,
20 respectively. The server process generates one or more random events that determine the outcome of the multiplayer slots game, such as determining the outcomes of spins of the reels in the various single-player video slots games of the participating players. The client process of any particular computer workstation (4) obtains the result of the random events from the gaming server
25 (2), along the communication network (9) and displays the outcome of the game on the display monitor (5) of the workstation in an intelligible manner, by causing the player's set of slots reels to spin and to come to rest at a position corresponding to the outcome. In order to play the game of multiplayer slots from any particular computer workstation (4), the client process (not shown) must first
30 be downloaded to that computer workstation from the gaming server (2) and then installed on the workstation.

In use, a player wishing to participate in the game of multiplayer slots uses a computer workstation (4) to access an online casino website (3a, 3b) of his
35 choice. A flow diagram outlining the steps required in order for a player to participate in an instance of the game is indicated in Figure 2. The player is

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5 presented with an icon (not shown) on the GUI on his computer workstation (4), which the user can activate in order to request participation in the multiplayer slots game. The user's request for participation (100) is passed by the online casino website (3a, 3b) to the gaming server (2), which adjudicates and processes the request in the following manner:

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1. If all existing instances of the multiplayer slots game are currently being played by 8 players, the existing instances of the game are all fully occupied and the would-be player cannot be admitted to any instance of the game (101). The user is notified of the situation and prompted to join a waiting list of would-be players (102);

15

2. if any one of the existing instances of the multiplayer slots game does have a vacancy, the would-be player is admitted to that instance of the game (103) or, if previously on the waiting list, is removed therefrom and admitted to that instance of the game. An appropriate multiplayer slots GUI is presented to the newly-admitted player (at 104) to allow him to play the game and to place wagers thereon;

20

3. the register of active participating players is updated (at 105) to include the details of the newly-admitted player, together with data representative of the online casino from which the player was admitted to the game, as well as the particular instance of the game to which he has been admitted;

25

4. when the waiting list of would-be players has grown sufficiently large, say 4 or 5 would-be players (106), the gaming server spawns a new instance of the game (107) to accommodate the would-be players in the waiting list, and the list is flushed (108); and

30

5. the register of active participating players is updated (105) to include the details of all the newly-admitted players in the newly-spawned instance of the game, together with data representative of the online casino from

35

18

5 which the players were admitted to the instance of the game, as well as the particular instance of the game to which the players have been admitted.

10 Any player is able to leave the instance of the multiplayer slots game in which he is participating at any time upon completion of a turn of that instance of the game. A flow diagram outlining the steps required for a player to leave an existing instance of the game is outlined in Figure 3. When a participating player leaves an instance of the multiplayer slots game (200), the player's departure results in the system (1) undertaking the following actions:

15

1. the GUI corresponding to the multiplayer slots game on the computer workstation is replaced by one allowing the player to select another casino game to play (201);
- 20 2. the departing player's details are removed from the register of active participating players (202); and
3. the remaining instances of the game are analysed in order to collapse any sparsely populated instances of the game and to consolidate the participating players in these instances into a single more densely-
- 25 populated instance of the game (203).

30 The participating players in any instance of the game all place wagers on a turn of the multiplayer slots game, as described above. Once the turn of the multiplayer slots game has been completed, the application web server (12) determines which of the participating players is the winner of the turn according to the rules of the game and settles the wagers placed by the participating players on that turn of the instance of the game as follows, as indicated in Figure 4:

35

- 19
- 5 1. the gaming server (2) notifies an online casino website (3a, 3b) associated with each player who has made a wager on the turn of the game (300). Each of the online casino websites (3a, 3b) then debits the individual credit account of its associated player by an amount equivalent to the magnitude of that player's wager (301);
 - 10 2. the clearing account of an online casino website (3a, 3b) associated with each player who has made a wager on the turn of the game is then debited by an amount equivalent to the magnitude of that player's corresponding wager (302);
 - 15 3. the clearing account of an online casino website (3a, 3b) associated with the player who has made the successful wager (303) on the turn of the game is credited by an amount equivalent to the total of all the wagers inclusive of the successful wager (304); and
 - 20 4. the gaming server (2) also notifies the online casino website (3a, 3b) associated with the successful player (305) and that online casino website credits the individual credit account of the successful player by an amount equivalent to the total of all the wagers inclusive of the successful wager
 - 25 (306).

The rules of the multiplayer game are outlined below, according to different variations of the game:

30 "POT SLOT" VARIATION

- a flow diagram outlining the steps of this variation of the multiplayer game is outlined in Figure 5;
 - a player may only occupy one of the 8 positions in an instance of the
- 35 multiplayer game;

20

- 5
- each player wagers a same amount, say \$x, on a turn of the multiplayer game. All the player wagers are accumulated in an accumulation account ("the pot"). With eight participating players, the pot will be \$8x;
 - once the participating players have all wagered, the sets of slot reels of all the participating players in the instance of the game spin in sequence,

10

 - while being visible to all players;
 - successful outcomes are awarded the following points values:

	<u>OUTCOME</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
--	----------------	---------------

15	3 x Blue 7	1000
	3 x Red 7	80
	3 x Any 7	40
	3 x Bar3	30
	3 x Bar2	20
20	3 x Bar1	10
	3 x Cherry	10
	3 x AnyBar	5
	Any 2 Cherry	5
	Any 1 Cherry	2

25

- the participating player whose outcome corresponds to the highest points value wins the pot;
- in the event of a tie, the pot is carried forward to the next turn of the multiplayer game;

30

- in the event of a carryover, each participating player is required to wager a further \$x, which is added to the pot;
- the participating player whose outcome corresponds to the highest points value wins the pot;
- the pot is carried forward a maximum of five times;

- 5 • after the fifth carryover, in the event of a further tie, the pot is shared equally between the players whose outcomes correspond to the highest points values.

"WINNER TAKE ALL" VARIATION

10

- a flow diagram outlining the steps of this variation of the multiplayer game is outlined in Figure 6;
- a player may only occupy one of the 8 positions in an instance of the multiplayer game;
- 15 • each player wagers a same amount, say \$x, on a turn of the multiplayer game. All the player wagers are accumulated in a pot. With eight participating players, the pot will be \$8x;
- once the participating players have all wagered, the set of slot reels of all the participating players in the instance of the game spin in sequence,
- 20 • while being visible to all players;
- successful outcomes of a game spin are awarded the following payouts:

	<u>OUTCOME</u>	<u>PAYOUT</u>
25	3 x Blue 7	\$1000
	3 x Red 7	\$80
	3 x Any 7	\$40
	3 x Bar3	\$30
	3 x Bar2	\$20
30	3 x Bar1	\$10
	3 x Cherry	\$10
	3 x AnyBar	\$5
	Any 2 Cherry	\$5
	Any 1 Cherry	\$2

35

- 5 • the payouts of all the participating players with successful outcomes of a game spin are accumulated in a prize pool and the participating player with the highest-paying successful outcome wins the prize pool;
- in the event of a tie, the prize pool is carried forward to the next turn of the multiplayer game;
- 10 • in the event of a carryover, each participating player is required to wager a further \$x, which is added to the pot, and payouts of all the participating players in the carryover spin are accumulated in the prize pool;
- the participating player with the highest-paying successful outcome in the carryover spin wins the prize pool;
- 15 • there is a maximum of five consecutive carryovers;
- after the fifth carryover, in the event of a further tie, the prize pool is shared equally between the players with the highest paying successful outcomes;
- the pot is paid over to an operator of the multiplayer gaming apparatus in order to fund the payouts won by the participating players.
- 20

"COMMUNITY SLOT" VARIATION

- 25 • a flow diagram outlining the steps of this variation of the multiplayer game is outlined in Figure 7;
- a player may only occupy one of the 8 positions in an instance of the multiplayer game;
- each player wagers a same amount, say \$x, on a turn of the multiplayer game. All the player wagers are accumulated in a pot. With eight participating players, the pot will be \$8x;
- 30 • once the participating players have all wagered, the sets of slot reels of all the participating players in the instance of the game spin in sequence, while being visible to all players;
- successful outcomes of a game spin are awarded the following payouts:
- 35

23

5	<u>OUTCOME</u>	<u>PAYOUT</u>
	3 x Blue 7	\$10000
	3 x Red 7	\$80
	3 x Any 7	\$40
10	3 x Bar3	\$30
	3 x Bar2	\$20
	3 x Bar1	\$10
	3 x Cherry	\$10
	3 x AnyBar	\$5
15	Any 2 Cherry	\$5
	Any 1 Cherry	\$2

- 20
- any player obtaining a successful outcome wins the corresponding payout, with the exception of the maximum payout, which is divided equally among all the participating players.
 - the pot is paid over to an operator of the multiplayer gaming apparatus in order to fund the payouts won by the participating players.

"BEST OF 5" VARIATION

- 25
- a flow diagram outlining the steps of this variation of the multiplayer game is outlined in Figure 8;
 - a player may only occupy one of the 5 positions in an instance of the multiplayer game;
- 30
- each player wagers a same amount, say \$x, on a turn of the multiplayer game. All the player wagers are accumulated in a pot. With eight participating players, the pot will be \$8x;
 - once the participating players have all wagered, the sets of slot reels of all the participating players in the instance of the game spin in sequence,
- 35
- while being visible to all players;

24

- 5 • successful outcomes of a game spin are awarded the following point values:

	<u>OUTCOME</u>	<u>POINTS</u>
10	3 x Blue 7	1000
	3 x Red 7	80
	3 x Any 7	40
	3 x Bar3	30
	3 x Bar2	20
15	3 x Bar1	10
	3 x Cherry	10
	3 x AnyBar	5
	Any 2 Cherry	5
	Any 1 Cherry	2

20

- each participating player is entitled to five turns of the single-user slots game;
- a player accumulates points corresponding to all successful outcomes obtained during the five turns of the single-user slots game;
- 25 • when each participating player has completed their respective five turns, the player with the highest accumulated points value wins the pot;
- in the event of a tie, the pot is shared equally between the players with the highest accumulated points values.

30 "POT SLOT WITH COMMUNITY FEATURE" VARIATION

- a flow diagram outlining the steps of this variation of the multiplayer game is outlined in Figure 9;
- this variation is the same as the Pot Slot variation of the multiplayer game
- 35 outlined above with the exception that, in the event of any player obtaining

- 5 a successful outcome that is one of the top three outcomes, each participating player unconditionally wins a payout according to the following pay table:

	<u>OUTCOME</u>	<u>WINNING PLAYER</u>	<u>REMAINING PLAYERS</u>
10	3 x Blue 7	\$3 000	\$500 each
	3 x Red 7	\$500	\$50 each
	3 x Any 7	\$50	\$5 each

- 15 • the contest for the pot continues independently of the above payouts, as described above.

"FREE SPINS" VARIATION

- 20 • each reel of the single-user slots game contains an indicium referred to as a "free spins" symbol (not shown);
- when this indicium occurs in an outcome of a player's turn of the multiplayer slots game, the player is permitted to enter the next turn of the game free of charge, without the necessity of first placing a wager.

25

"COMMUNITY SLOT—EVEN DISTRIBUTION" VARIATION

- a flow diagram outlining the steps of this variation of the multiplayer game is outlined in Figure 10;
- 30 • a player may only occupy one of the 8 positions in an instance of the multiplayer game;
- each player wagers a same amount, say \$x, on a turn of the multiplayer game. All the player wagers are accumulated in a pot. With eight participating players, the pot will be \$8x.

25

- 5
- once the participating players have all wagered, the sets of slot reels of all the participating players in the instance of the game spin in sequence, while being visible to all players;
 - successful outcomes of a game spin are awarded the following payouts:

10

<u>OUTCOME</u>	<u>PAYOUT</u>
3 x Blue 7	\$10000
3 x Red 7	\$80
3 x Any 7	\$40
15 3 x Bar3	\$30
3 x Bar2	\$20
3 x Bar1	\$10
3 x Cherry	\$10
3 x AnyBar	\$5
20 Any 2 Cherry	\$5
Any 1 Cherry	\$ 2

- the payouts of all successful spins are accumulated in a prize pool and the prize pool is divided equally among the participating players;
- 25 the pot is paid over to an operator of the multiplayer gaming apparatus in order to fund the payouts won by the participating players.

"COMMUNITY SLOTS - 50/50" VARIATION

- 30
- a flow diagram outlining the steps of this variation of the multiplayer game is outlined in Figure 11;
 - a player may only occupy one of the 8 positions in an instance of the multiplayer game;

- 5
- each player wagers a same amount, say \$x, on a turn of the multiplayer game. All the player wagers are accumulated in a pot. With eight participating players, the pot will be \$8x;
 - once the participating players have all wagered, the sets of slot reels of all the participating players in the instance of the game spin in sequence,

10

 - while being visible to all players;
 - successful outcomes of a game spin are awarded the following payouts:

	<u>OUTCOME</u>	<u>PAYOUT</u>
15	3 x Blue 7	\$10000
	3 x Red 7	\$80
	3 x Any 7	\$40
	3 x Bar3	\$30
	3 x Bar2	\$20
20	3 x Bar1	\$10
	3 x Cherry	\$10
	3 x AnyBar	\$5
	Any 2 Cherry	\$5
	Any 1 Cherry	\$ 2

- 25
- the payouts of all successful spins are accumulated in a prize pool. If there is only one participating player whose spin is successful, that player wins 50% of the prize pool, while the balance is divided equally between the remaining participating players. If there are two participating players

30

 - whose spins are successful, those players each win 35% of the prize pool, while the remaining 30% of the pool is divided equally between the remaining participating players. If there are three or more participating players whose spins are successful, the prize pool is divided equally between the winning players only;

28

- 5 • the pot is paid over to an operator of the multiplayer gaming apparatus in order to fund the payouts won by the participating players.

"COMMUNITY SLOT - 50 POOLED" VARIATION

- 10 • a flow diagram outlining the steps of this variation of the multiplayer game is outlined in Figure 12;
- a player may only occupy one of the 8 positions in an instance of the multiplayer game;
- each player wagers a same amount, say \$x, on a turn of the multiplayer game. All the player wagers are accumulated in a pot. With eight
- 15 participating players, the pot will be \$8x;
- once the participating players have all wagered, the sets of slot reels of all the participating players in the instance of the game spin in sequence, while being visible to all players;
- 20 • successful outcomes of a game spin are awarded the following payouts:

	<u>OUTCOME</u>	<u>PAYOUT</u>
	3 x Blue 7	\$10000
25	3 x Red 7	\$80
	3 x Any 7	\$40
	3 x Bar3	\$30
	3 x Bar2	\$20
	3 x Bar1	\$10
30	3 x Cherry	\$10
	3 x AnyBar	\$5
	Any 2 Cherry	\$5
	Any 1 Cherry	\$ 2

29

- 5 • half the payout attributable to a successful spin is awarded to the corresponding player, while the balance is accumulated in a prize pool, which is divided equally among all the participating players;
- the pot is paid over to an operator of the multiplayer gaming apparatus in order to fund the payouts won by the participating players.

10

The wagers placed by the players participating in the multiplayer slots game are made with credit purchased by such players prior to their participation in the game. For this purpose, each online casino (3a, 3b) includes credit-dispensing;
15 means (not shown) capable of dispensing credit to any player who wishes to participate in the game. The player may purchase credit by means of conventional credit or debit card payment facilities that are well known in the art and which will not be described here in detail. Whenever a player purchases credit from the credit-dispensing means, the corresponding online casino (3a, 3b)
20 credits that player's credit account with an amount equivalent to the quantity of credit purchased by the player.

The above embodiment of the invention does not provide any compensation for an operator of the multiplayer gaming system (1) who provides the participating
25 players with a facility to play the multiplayer slots game, or for the online casino websites (3a, 3b) that make their players available to the gaming server (2) for establishment of the multiplayer slots game. In a variation of the above embodiment, the application web server (12) withholds a portion of the pot or, alternatively, a fixed amount, on each turn of the multiplayer slots game as a rake
30 for the benefit of the operator of the gaming server (2) and the online casino websites (3a, 3b). A portion of the rake is credited to the clearing account of each online casino (3a, 3b) as a function of the proportion of players participating in the instance of the multiplayer game through that particular casino website. In this variation of the embodiment, the clearing account of the casino (3a, 3b)
35 associated with the player who has made a successful wager on the turn of the

5 game is credited with an amount equivalent to the total of all the wagers inclusive of the successful wager, less the amount of the rake. Analogously, the credit account of the player who has made the successful wager is credited by an amount equivalent to the total of all the wagers inclusive of the successful wager, less the rake.

10

It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the invention permits implementation of a multiplayer game out of separate instances of a traditionally single-player game played by each one of a plurality of players. This is achieved by combining an adjudication process together with the separate instances of the
15 single-player game that provides for the determination of a winner, or joint winners, of the multiplayer game as a function of the individual outcomes of the multiple separate instances of the single-player game.

The resulting multiplayer game is an exciting one that can cause emotions of the participating players to swing widely. For example, when a player obtains a high-ranking successful outcome during a turn of the multiplayer game, his desire is that all subsequent players obtain unsuccessful or lower-ranking outcomes that will not affect that player's chance of winning the turn of the multiplayer game. If, on the other hand, a subsequent participating player obtains a better outcome,
25 then the preceding player's desire will change to one that another player will obtain a matching result, thereby resulting in a carryover that will provide the first player with another chance of winning the turn of the multiplayer game.

It will be further appreciated that such an arrangement where players from
30 several online casino websites (3a, 3b) are pooled for the purpose of establishing a multiplayer game, requires the use of a clearing account facility to manage and process the flow of credit between the various online casinos from which the pool of players are drawn.

35 Numerous modifications are possible to this embodiment without departing from the scope of the invention. Foremost, the single-user game on which the

5 multiplayer game is based may be a different game, such as video poker, for
example, or roulette. The single-player game of video poker has a hierarchy of
successful outcomes and may be used in place of video slots without any
substantial changes to the rules of the multiplayer game described above. Every
participating player starts an instance of the single-player video poker game with
10 an identical hand and each player is required to decide which cards to hold in his
own hand. It is important, for reasons of equity that each participating player
plays out of an identical deck of playing cards. Roulette is different in that there is
no hierarchy of outcomes but can, nevertheless, be used as the underlying
single-player game by providing each participating player with a same initial
15 stake, and selecting the winner of the multiplayer game to be the player who
registers the greatest increase, or smallest loss, of initial stake in a turn of the
game of roulette.

Further, other variations to the rules of the multiplayer game are possible, other
20 than those described above. For example, the "Winner Takes All" variation can
be altered to provide that the winning player wins 50% of the prize pool with the
balance being divided equally between all the other participating players.

Still further, the multiplayer gaming system (1) need not be an on-line
25 embodiment as described above, but may, for example, be an embodiment
suitable for deployment in a land-based establishment such as a casino. In this
instance, the multiplayer gaming system (1) may be deployed as a bank of
adjacent player stations, each linked to the administration facility (12) by means
of a local area network.

30 Additionally, each spawned instance of the multiplayer game, or slots room, may
be uniquely named, with naming rights being awarded to participating players
who are deemed to be high rollers, thus increasing the attractiveness of the
system (1) to prospective players. A high roller may also rent one or more slots
35 rooms from an operator of the multiplayer gaming system (1), with revenue
arising from the slots rooms being shared between the operator and the high

32

5 roller. This mode of operation provides an incentive to the high roller to promote his slots rooms and to create virtual slots communities in order to maximise revenue therefrom.

10 It is also possible for the highest-ranking outcome of the single-player game to be linked to a payout that is a progressive jackpot, incremented by a proportion of each player wager.

15 Still further, the administration facility (12) can be arranged to monitor the individual credit account balances of the participating players at the online casino websites (3a and 3b) and to cause the gaming server (2) to terminate participation in the game of any player whose credit account balance drops below a predetermined minimum threshold. Yet further, the administration facility may also require each clearing account associated with an on-line casino website to exceed a prescribed minimum balance at all times, and for the administration
20 facility (12) to terminate participation in the game of all players who have accessed the game through an online casino website whose associated account balance falls below the prescribed minimum balance. Yet further, the credit dispensing means (not shown) may be a centralised credit dispensing means, instead of a distributed one available through each online casino website (3a, 3b). Finally, a portal need not be an online casino website where a variety of
25 different games are offered to a player, but rather a slots room where multiplayer slots is the only game available to would-be players.

30 The technical problem solved by this invention is to enable implementation of multiplayer games, such as those mentioned above, which are based on traditionally single-user games, drawing and pooling players from different, possibly competing, entities such as online casinos or other groups such as sports betting organisations and the like. The invention performs dynamic load management by spawning new instances of the multiplayer game and collapsing and merging sparsely populated instances of the game to accommodate
35 changing levels of player demand.

5

The invention therefore provides a novel apparatus and method for establishing and conducting the progress of a multiplayer game that is based on multiple instances of a traditionally single-user game played by each one of a plurality of players.

10

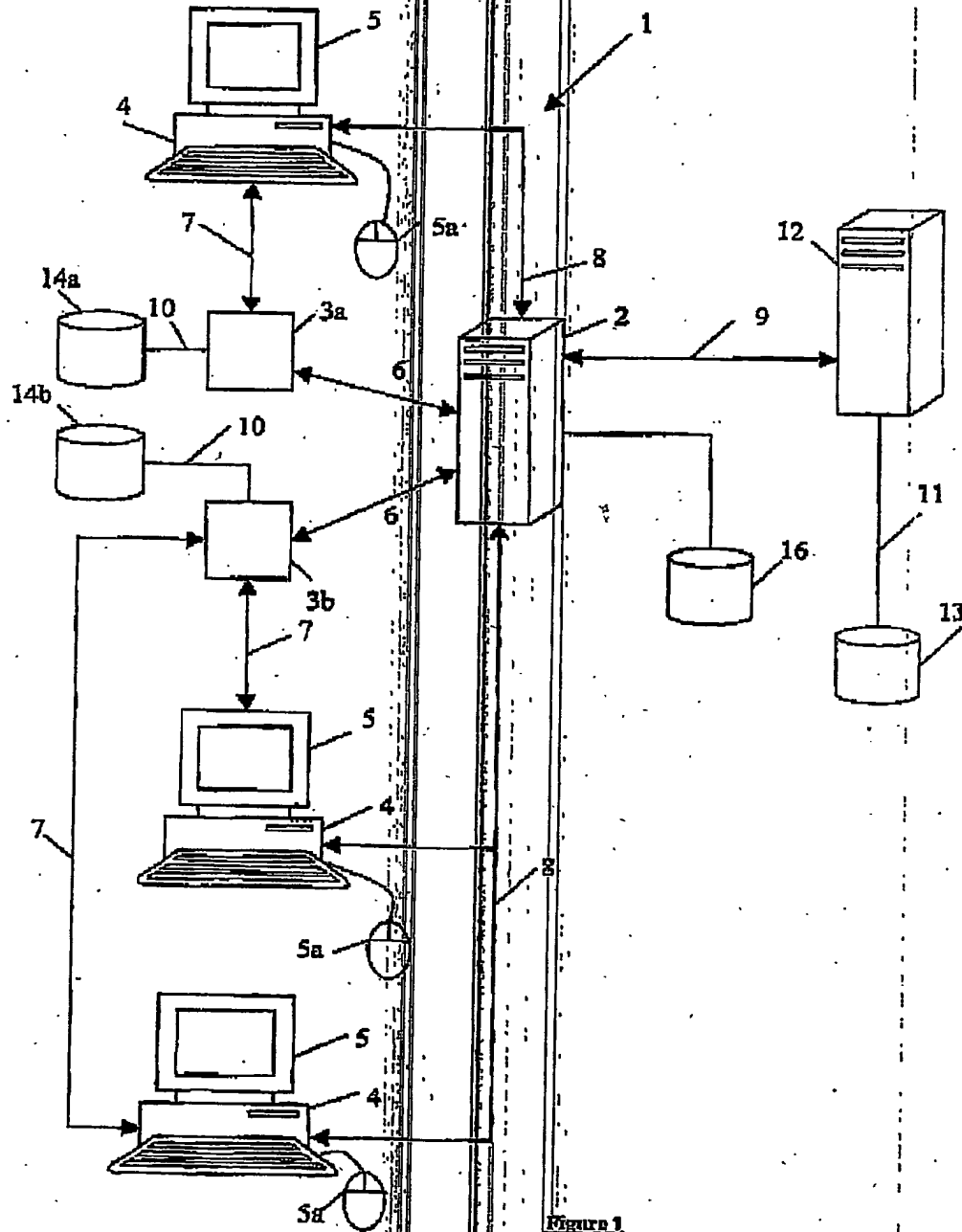


Figure 1

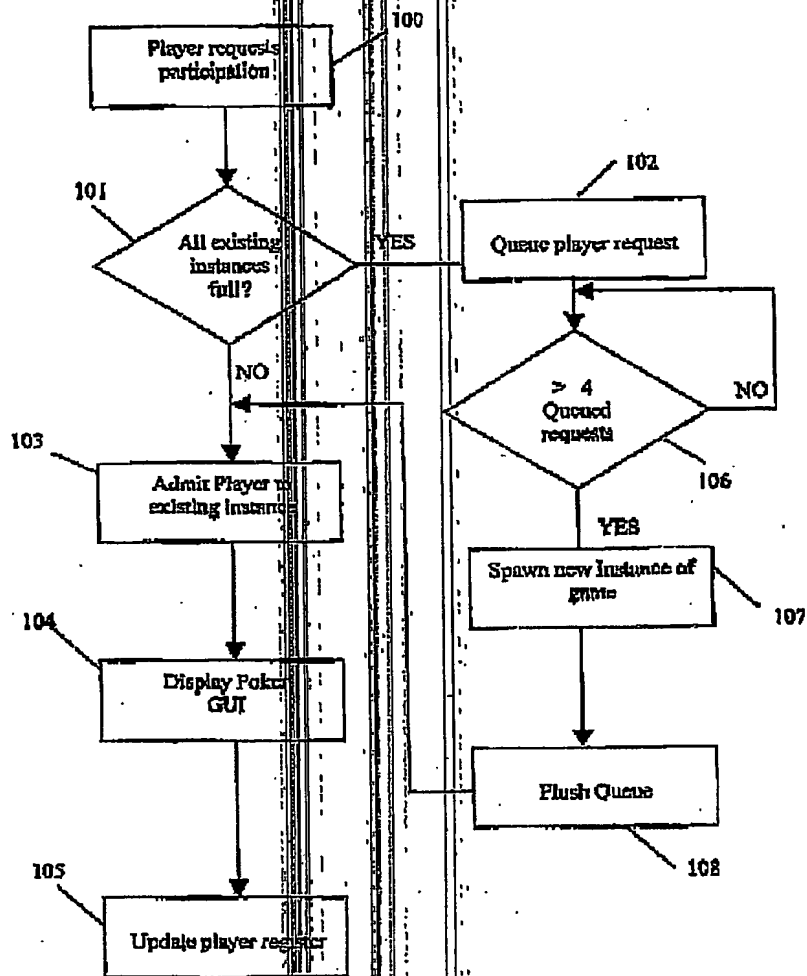


Figure 2

3/2

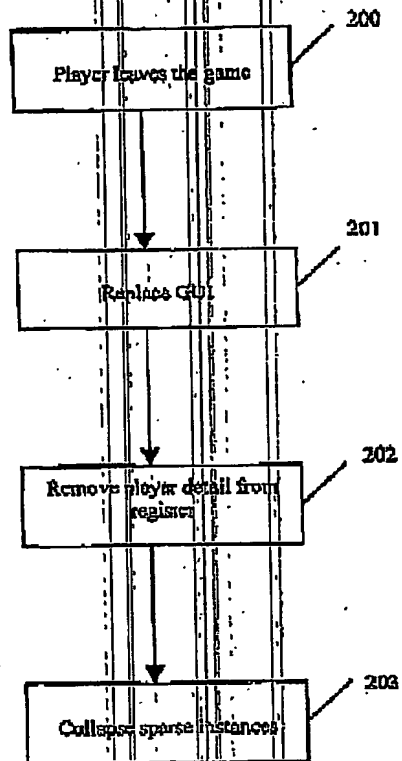


Figure 3

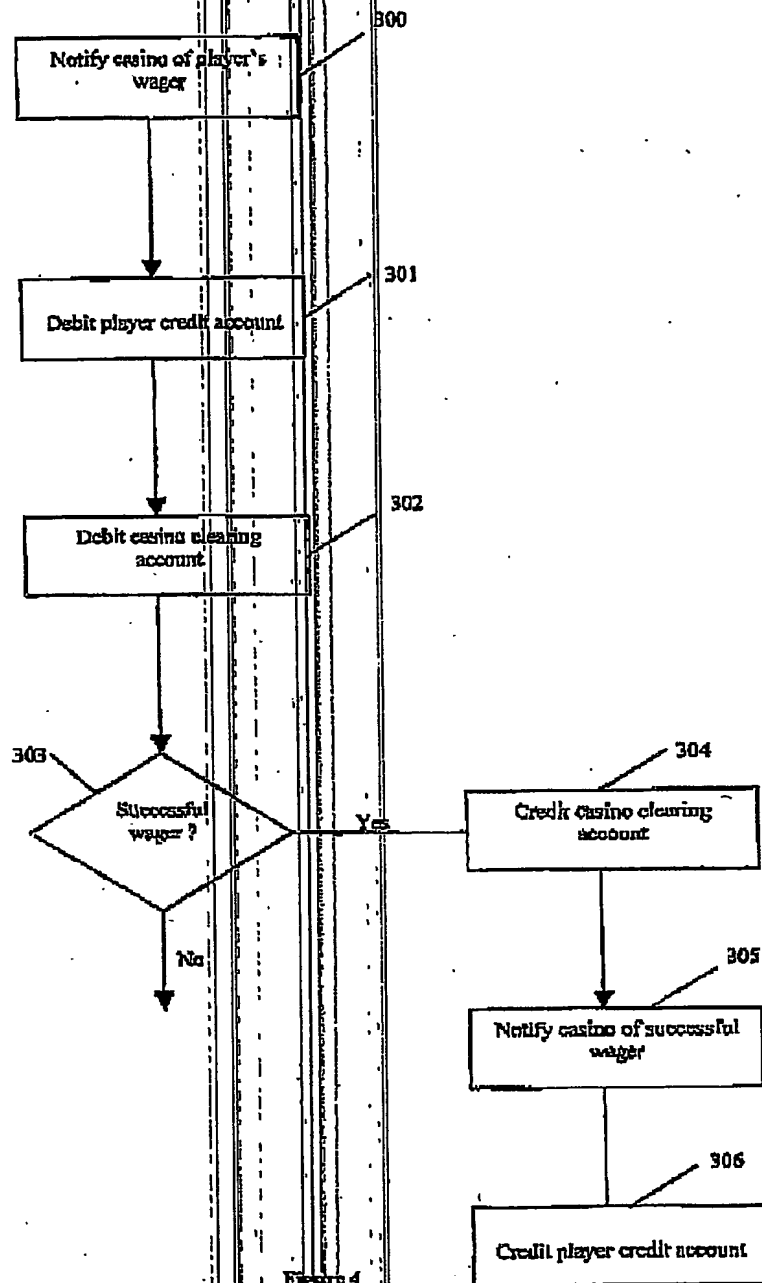


Figure 4

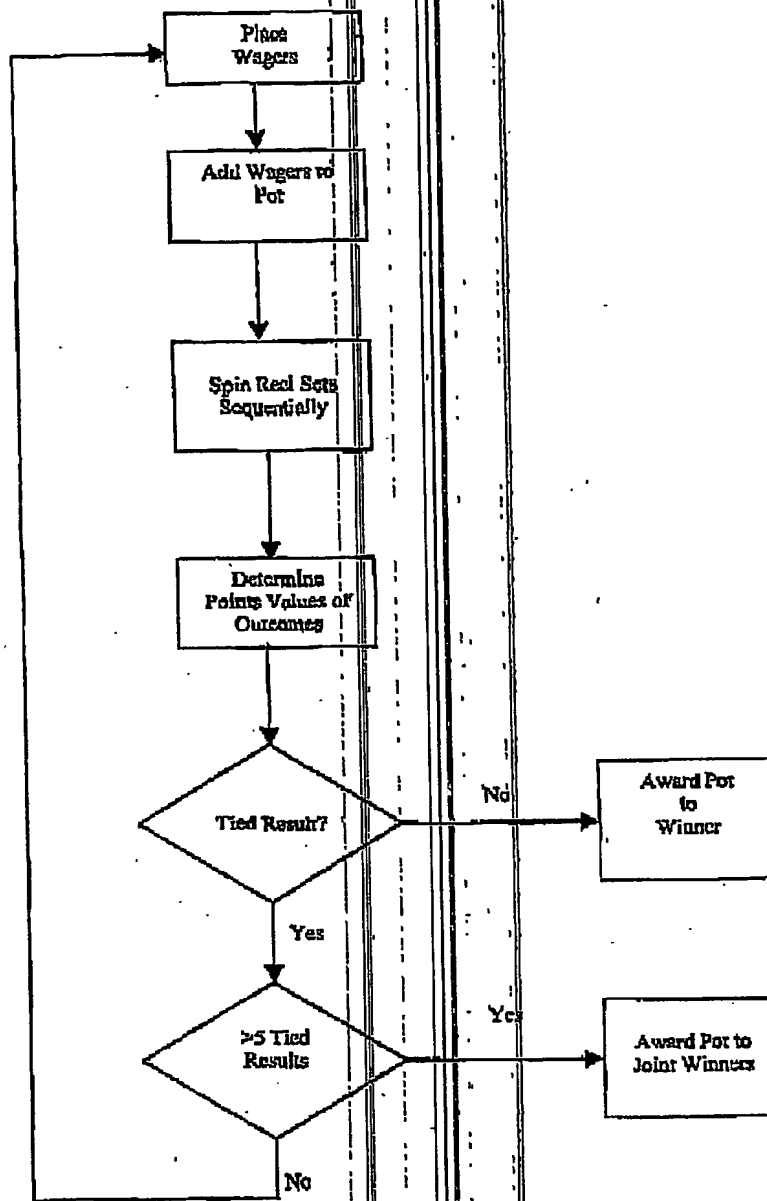


Figure 5

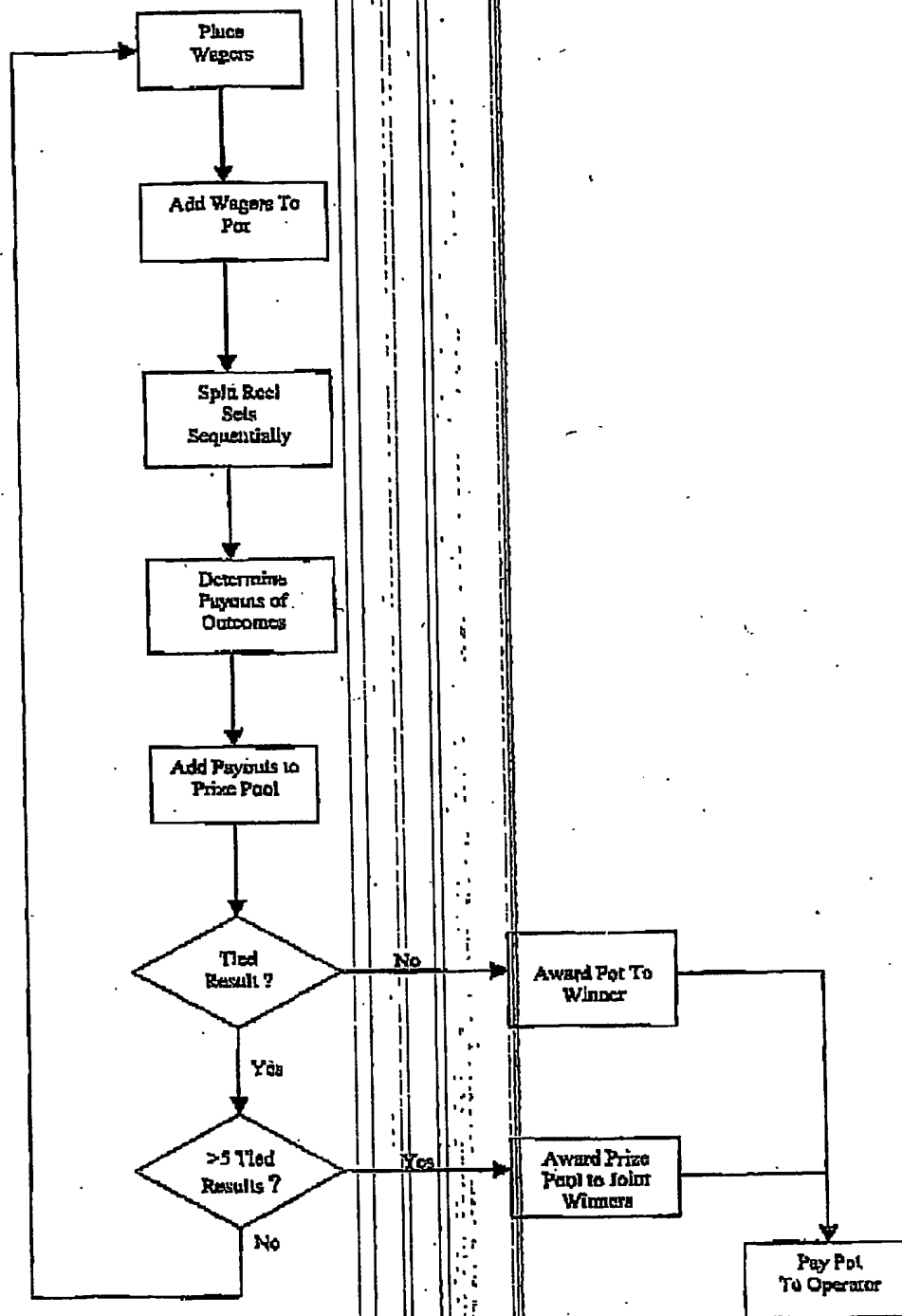


Figure 6

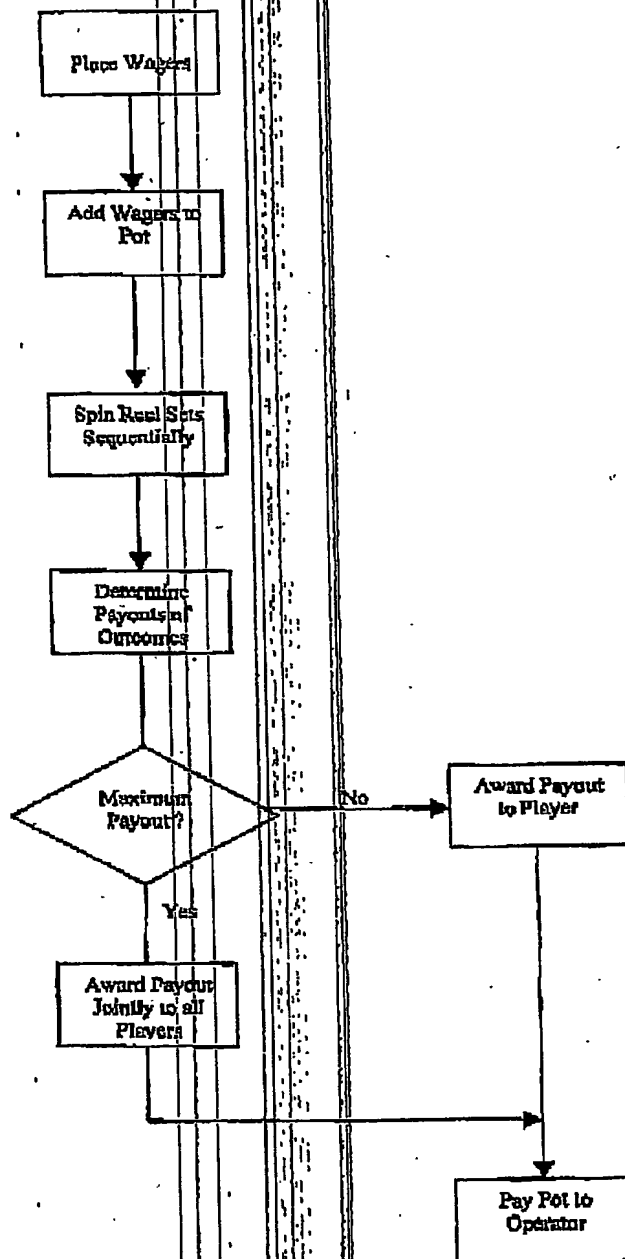


Figure 7

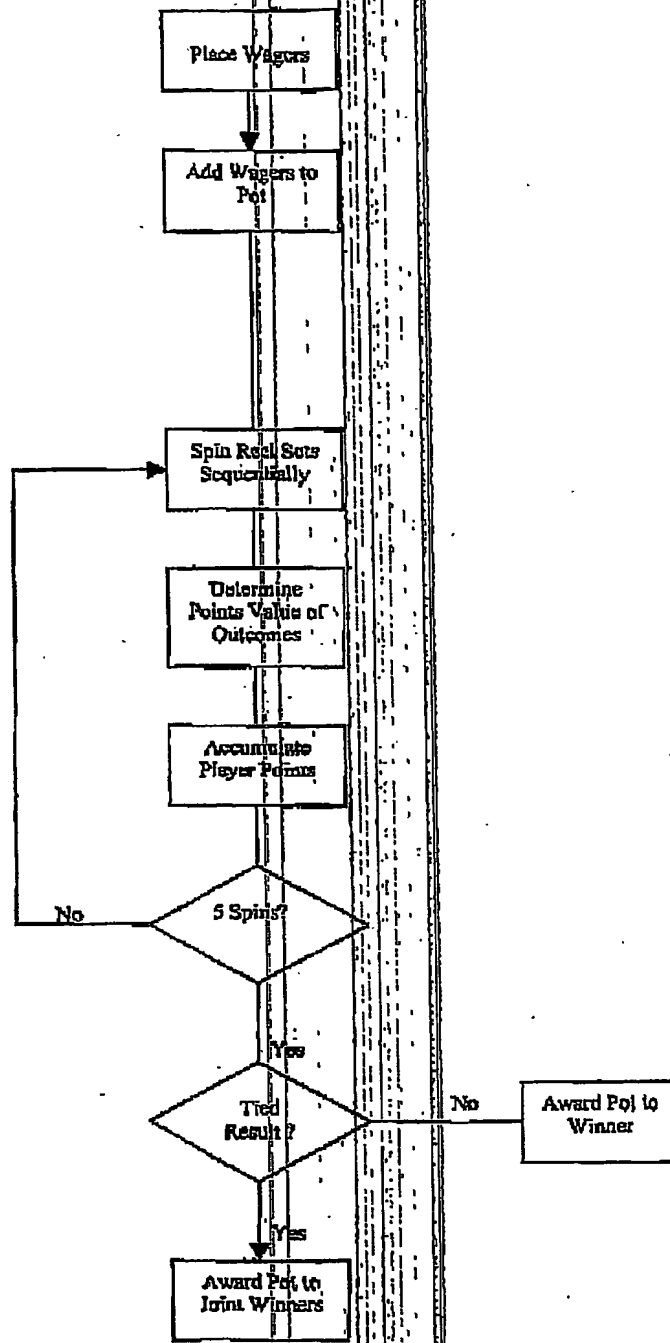


Figure 8.

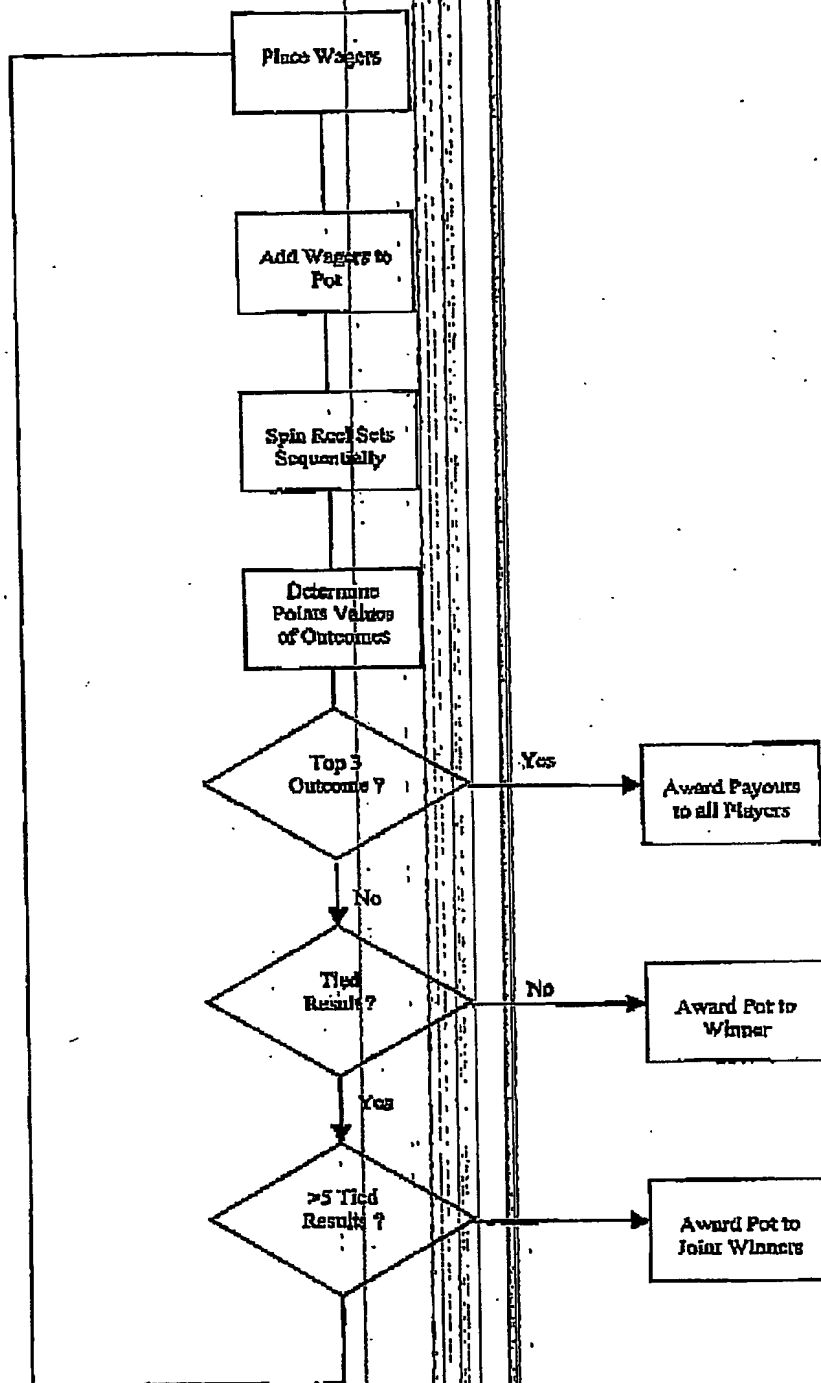


Figure 2

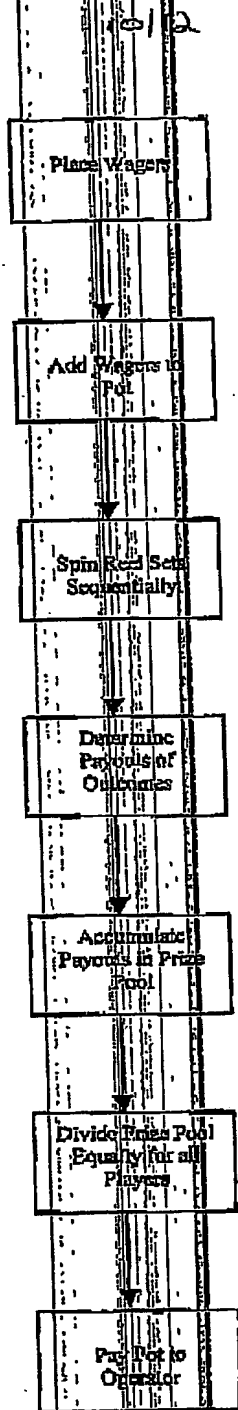


Figure 10

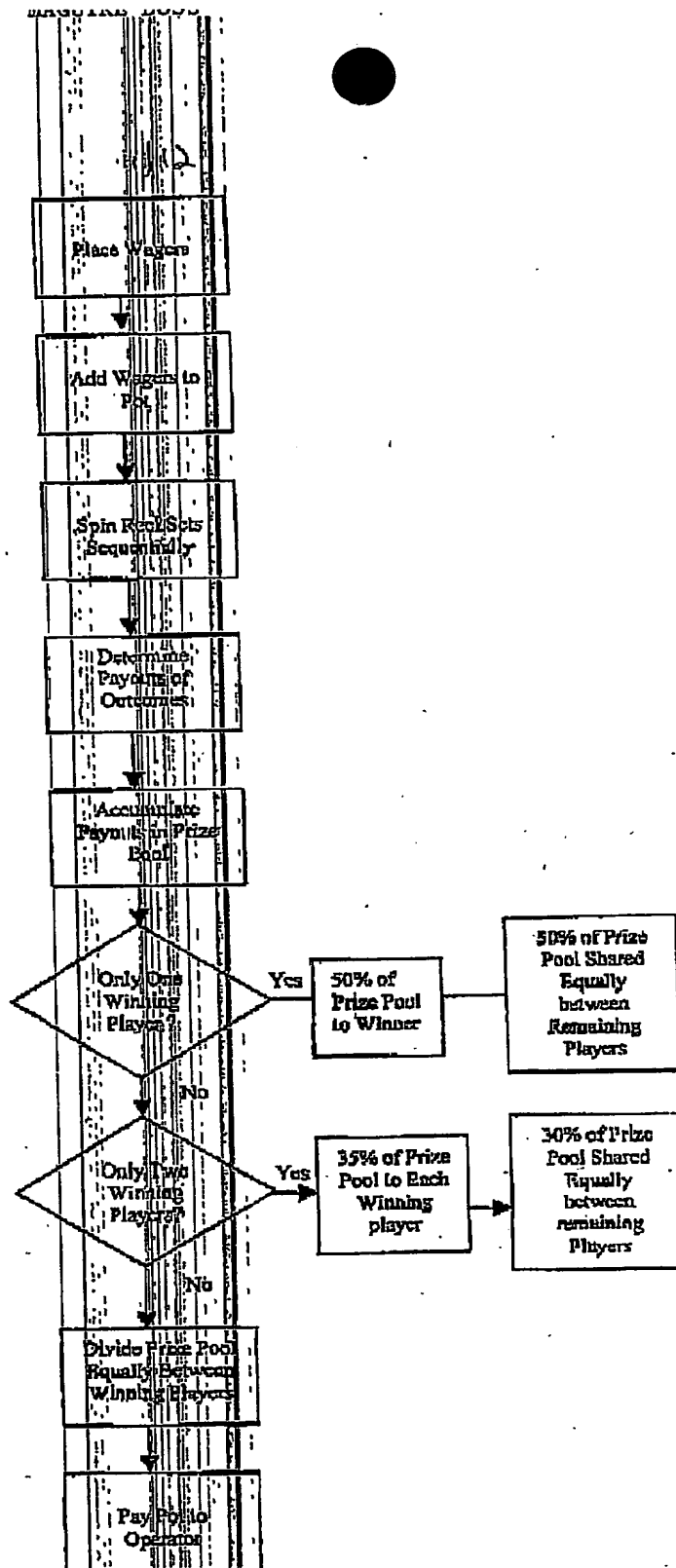


Figure 11

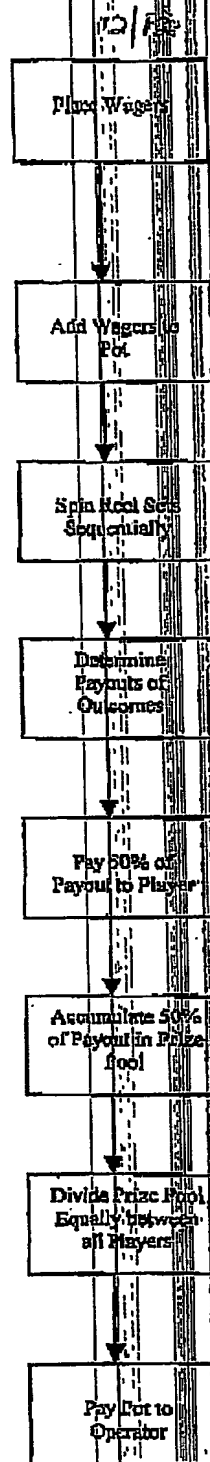


Figure 12

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